A

SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

Church of *St. George the Martyr*,

LONDON,

On *Friday*, *March* 12, 1762.

[Price Sixpence.]

A

SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

Church of *St. George the Martyr*,

LONDON,

On *Friday*, *March* 12, 1762;

Being the Day appointed for a General FAST and HUMILIATION.

By the Rev. JAMES SHEELES,
Of *Trinity College*, *Cambridge*.

Publiſhed at the Requeſt of the CONGREGATION.

LONDON:
Printed for W. FLEXNEY, near Gray's-Inn-Gate, HOLBORN. M.DCC.LXII.

SERMON

A

SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

Church of *St. George the Martyr.*

JEREMIAH III. xxi, xxii.

A Voice was heard upon the high Places, weeping and Supplications of the Children of Iſrael, *for they have perverted their Way, and they have forgotten the Lord their God. Return ye back-ſliding Children, and I will heal your back-ſlidings; Behold, we come unto Thee, for Thou art the Lord our God—*

WHEN Hazael *was ſent to* Eliſha, *the Prophet wept; and* Hazael *ſaid, why weepeth my Lord? and He anſwered, Becauſe I know the Evil that Thou wilt do unto the Children of* Iſrael; and when he had

enumerated every Species of Cruelty, and Exceſs, which He ſhould put in Practice againſt Them, *Hazael ſaid, But what, is thy Servant a Dog, that He ſhould do this great Thing? and* Eliſha *anſwered, The Lord hath ſhewed me, that Thou ſhalt be King over* Syria. Accordingly, we find He fell a Victim to Proſperity, and all Things were fulfilled, as the Prophet had foretold Them.

THERE is in the Frame and Government of Civil Society, a certain regular Conſiſtency, and uniform Propriety of Order, reſembling the domeſtic Oeconomy of a ſingle Family, and juſtifying a Compariſon between the State of this Nation, and the Children of *Iſrael* in general, or the Circumſtances above-mentioned of this Man's Life in particular, wherein, as our preſent Situation may not in every Particular correſpond with the Situation of the *Jews* at this Period of their Hiſtory, ſo I ſuppoſe, there was no Reaſon to expect ſuch imminent Danger to us, from the Proſperity, to which the ſame Hand had raiſed us, or that We ſhould arrive at ſo terrible a Degree of Irreligion and Prophaneneſs, even

in the dreadful Time of God's Viſitation upon us.

When at length, the ſecret Sins of Individuals, have ſwelled to a Public Account, and like a Torrent, overwhelmed every Attempt to oppoſe their Progreſs, when *the Stones of the Wall have cried, and the Beams anſwered Them*, let me ſuſpend for a Moment the tumultuous Thoughts, involved in the careful Buſineſs of the World; let me recal the gay and volatile Spirits, intoxicated with the Pleaſures of Life, and God grant me ſuch a Portion of his Holy Spirit, as may enable me to alarm your Attention, like the Hand-writing on the Wall, that we may look each into the Condition of his own Heart, that if We have lately learnt, We cannot *truſt we have a good Conſcience*, we may make it the Labour of our Lives, that our *Conſcience condemn us not*, that then we may have *Confidence towards God*; and if we find upon this Review, that we live in Times, when *deceiving our own ſelves*, we call Virtue Vice, and ſophiſtically dreſs Vice in the Character of Virtue, when Profuſeneſs is ſtiled Magnificence,

Violence termed Valour, Diſſoluteneſs Gentility, Fraud and Treachery Prudence; when Sincerity is loſt from among us by being termed Folly, Patience called Irreſolution, and Conſcience Superſtition; let your Conſciences anſwer me like a faithful Echo, and let us lift up our Hands and Hearts, once more in Repentance, to an injured GOD, now, when the glorious Majeſty, and awful Preſence of the DEITY among us, ſhould compoſe our Hearts into an holy and ſerious Frame, and make us join with the Univerſal Outcry of the People for Mercy, ſaying, *Save, Lord, and hear us, O King of Heaven, when we call upon Thee.*

WE may look around Us, and ſee a Nation, almoſt able to give Laws to the World, a City not inferior to *Rome* in its Splendor; or to *Athens*, in the Cultivation of the Arts and Sciences; wherein theſe laſt are brought to almoſt every poſſible Degree of Perfection, ſome of the greateſt Improvements and moſt important Diſcoveries, having been added to Them within the Compaſs of the laſt Century.

I WILL take no Notice of a Conſideration naturally ariſing from this Reflection, that the Perfection to which every Thing is now arrived, forms ſuch a Contraſt, to the Unſkilfulneſs of the Ages at the Beginning of the World, as cannot fail to remind Us of the probable near Approach of the End of it, and the final Conſummation of all Things. I take no Notice of this, becauſe the Day of our Death, is in Fact the Diſſolution of all Things to Us, yet I imagine every Body will agree with me, that They would be filled with a moſt horrible Senſe of the approaching Terrors, if they believed the Diſſolution of this Syſtem as near, as that Hour which ſhall Cut them off from amongſt us. From what ſtrange Principle can it then proceed, that in the midſt of the good Things we have enjoyed, while our merciful God has been ſhowering his Benefits upon us, *We are altogether corrupted and become abominable*, while He has gone forth with our Fleets and Armies, He has heard the Cry of our Sins at Home, and in Return, has *poured the*

Spirit of deep Sleep upon Us, while He was fighting our Battles, and protecting our Cauſe, (like the *Iſraelites*, when *Moſes* was interceding with God for Them) we have ſet up a God of our own in his Temple and bowed down before it, ſacrificing even the Temple itſelf to a God of Gold. Religion like its Teachers is become a bye Word, *the Courts of the Lord's Houſe are as deſolate Places*, and none but the Poor and the Aged enquire after Him. In Situations ſuch as is our own at preſent, it has frequently happened that the Almighty hath puniſhed an offending People by bringing ſome general Calamity upon Them, from the Deſtruction of the whole World, to that of particular Nations, as the *Babylonian* Empire, or of particular Cities as of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*; Hiſtory ſhews us, how one People have been made a Scourge to ſubdue the Enemies of God, as the Victory of the *Romans* at *Jeruſalem*, and then been Cut off themſelves by another, as the total Subverſion of their mighty Empire.

THANKS be to God, He hath not as yet dealt with Us after our Sins, nor hitherto re-

warded Us after our Iniquities, as He ſent Plagues among Them, his merciful Hand hath thus far heaped nothing but Bleſſings upon Us, We have enjoyed the good Things which his long-ſufferance hath provided for Us, each under his own Fig-Tree, and ſeem to want nothing but the revival of Religion with the Spirit of Devotion, to make us (as we are the moſt abandoned and ungrateful) the happieſt and beſt People.

THE Judgments inflicted upon the laſt Century ſhould warn Us to Fly to Heaven for Mercy, to ſave Us *from the Wrath to come*, when the deſtroying Angel was let looſe in this great City, and the Fire conſumed what the Peſtilence had ſpared: The Infection of Royal Example, had poiſoned the very Source and Fountain of all Religion, and the enormous Impieties of the Prince and his People, have left this uſeful Leſſon upon dreadful Record, that *it is an Abomination for Kings to commit Wickedneſs*, and a Reproach to a wiſe Man *to follow a Multitude to do Evil.*

WHETHER all theſe Calamities, were intended as Viſitations, to puniſh the wicked neglect of the unhappy People, is not revealed to us, but that many of them were, we have the Teſtimony of God himſelf. Let Us therefore look into the preſent State of Religion among Us, let Us conſider whether the Life we live is becoming Us as Men, or Chriſtians, and whether it be conſiſtent with the Purity of the Goſpel; whether Hiſtory can produce a Period of Time, wherein Religion was ſo ſenſibly declining, and ſo univerſally neglected as it is at preſent, when the People of *low* Eſtate run *into the Wilderneſs* after Madmen and pretended Enthuſiaſts, and thoſe of *high* Condition after none at all; when the *Rich* inſtead of being *zealous of good Works* do none, and the *Poor* are even Taught to believe none neceſſary, when *one with another* deſert their Church and its Miniſtry, if in Compliance with any other, perhaps for foppiſh Ignorance from *Rome*, or papiſtical Knavery from the Tabernacle, when all the

People are idolatrous Lovers of Pleaſure; when great Abilities, and a good Heart, are no recommendations in Church or State, and excepting a few glorious Inſtances, which ſhine like the Moon among the Stars, both the one and the other are made wholly ſubſervient to the mercenary Purpoſes of filthy Lucre. *Wherefore ſhall I not deſtroy ſuch a Nation as this, ſaith the Lord? a ſinful Nation. a People laden with Iniquity, a Seed of evil Doers, they have forſaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of* Iſrael *to Anger, they are gone away backward, why ſhould ye be ſtricken any more, ye will revolt more and more, the whole Head is ſick and the whole Heart faint.* We have received the Bleſſings of the Almighty, as the Earth the ſoft Showers from Heaven, which make it fruitful, and were as blind to his miraculous Interpoſitions, as the *Egyptians* were, when the Heart of their Ruler was hardened within Him.

We might with Reaſon have expected, that ſuch dreadful Viſitations would have prevented a ſinful People, however wickedly diſ-

poſed, from falling into a State of heedleſs Security. But We waited till God himſelf ſhould awake, *as one out of Sleep*, and remind Us of our Condition, by ſpeaking to Us in the Whirlwind and Tempeſt! At length We were terrified with the Apprehenſions of Danger, and found for a Moment our only Comfort in Prayer and Humiliation; for *the Foundations of the round World were removed, when God aroſe to ſhake terribly the Earth, when He ſmote* Us, *then* We *knew Him*, and for a ſhort Time, the Seeds of Devotion ſeemed to be ſpringing up among Us, and likely to *bring forth Fruit an hundred-fold*: But no ſooner were his Terrors removed, than we were convinced the Seed had fallen *on ſtony Ground, and withered away becauſe it had no Root, or elſe among Thorns, and the Thorns grew up together with it and choaked it.* Twice We have been ſmitten in our Cattle and in our Fields, and the Peſtilence with the Famine have been at our very Gates. Twice We have been threatened with Rebellion and Invaſions, and our Holy Church been endangered from the Attempts of Popery,

aſſiſted by her Auxiliary, popiſh Enthuſiaſm. yet for all this We remain as wicked and irreligious as the *Jews*, whom we accuſe for their Obſtinacy and Stubbornneſs, more hardened than the Heart of *Pharoah*, nothing but the *Vials of his Wrath* poured out upon Us, ſeems able to eſtabliſh Goodneſs among Us, and notwithſtanding We have ſeen how He hath dealt with Others, We muſt feel the heavy Hand of his Indignation *upon Us, and on our Children*, before We believe the Powers of his Anger. *In that Day who ſhall have Pity upon Thee*, ſays the Prophet, *Thou haſt forſaken the Lord, Thou haſt gone backward, therefore I will ſtretch out my Hand againſt Thee, and deſtroy Thee; I am weary of Repenting; and it ſhall come to paſs, if they ſay unto Thee, whither ſhall we go forth, then thou ſhalt tell them, thus ſaith the Lord: Such as are for Death, to Death, and ſuch as are for the Sword, to the Sword, and ſuch as for the Famine, to the Famine, and ſuch as are for the Captivity, to the Captivity.*

Yet who hath believed our Report, and to whom hath the Arm of the Lord been revealed,

for when the Trumpet hath been blown in Zion *to ſanctify a Faſt, and to call a ſolemn Aſſembly:* Ye have brought Hearts wholly devoted to the unſalutary Purpoſes of this World; *when the Prieſts, the Miniſters of the Lord, have Wept between the Porch and the Altar*, ſaying, *Spare thy People, O Lord, and give not thy Heritage to Reproach, that the Heathen ſhould rule over Them*; like the *Athenians*, when *St. Paul* preached to them of the Reſurrection of the Body, and future Judgment, *ſome mocked, and ſome believed, and others ſaid we will hear Thee again of this Matter:* But we have prolonged the Time of our Repentance, beyond what even Mercy could allow, and *the Beginning of Sorrows* is come upon Us, *We looked for Peace*, ſays Iſaiah, *and there is no good, and for the Time of Healing, and behold Trouble. Your Iniquities have turned away theſe Things, and your Sins have witholden good Things from you.* When we hoped to ſee Peace flouriſhing out of the Land, the Face of War ſtill looks frightfully upon Us, and our exhauſted Treaſures muſt contend with the inexhauſtible Mines of *Peru*. Wherefore *be thou inſtructed*,

O Jeruſalem, *leſt my Soul depart from Thee, leſt I make Thee deſolate, a Land not inhabited, for I am weary with holding in, I will pour out upon the Children abroad, and upon the Aſſembly of young Men together, for even the Huſband with the Wife ſhall be taken, the aged, with Him that is full of Days*; not even the thoughtleſs Youth and Inadvertency of the Lovers of Pleaſure can be ſpared, in that Day, *like the Daughters of the Chaldeans they muſt ſit ſilent, who ſaid in their Hearts, I ſhall be a Lady for ever, I ſhall not ſit as a Widow, neither ſhall I know the loſs of Children, ſo that they did not lay theſe Things to their Heart, neither remembered the latter End of it, Therefore*, ſays the Prophet, *hear Thou this, O Thou that art given to Pleaſures, and dwelleſt careleſsly; Theſe two Things muſt come unto Thee in a Moment, in one Day, the Loſs of Children, and Widowhood—thus ſhall* They *be unto Thee, with whom Thou haſt laboured, they ſhall wander every one to his Quarter, none can ſave Thee.*

THESE are the melancholy Denunciations of the Prophets, whoſe Deſcription was never ſo ſtrongly fulfilled as in the People of this Nation at this Time, whoſe puniſhment will certainly overwhelm Us, unleſs we can deviſe ſome gracious Means, to ſatisfy an injured, and neglected God; the Means, We have ſtill Reaſon to believe are in our Power, and a Deſire from the Soul to return and ſeek after Him, half appeaſes Him; He is no leſs *a God afar off*, then *at Hand*, and though We have provoked Him by our Sins beyond Meaſure, yet *if We confeſs* and repent Us of *our Sins, God is faithful and juſt to forgive Us our Sins, and to cleanſe Us from all Unrighteouſneſs*, but We muſt no more offer to Him the Sacrifice of Fools, nor draw nigh to Him with our Lips, when our Hearts are far from Him. But by Faith We muſt draw nigh to Him, on the Wings of Prayer We may rely for Hope, and imitate Him in Acts of Charity and univerſal Benevolence.

I REMARKED before, the prevalence of Royal Example, in the mention of thoſe Times which have left their Contagion like a Curſe behind Them, We may therefore ſtill hope by the Bleſſing of God to ſee better Days, and Peace in *Iſrael*, when the Crown receives a Luſtre unknown to it before, when the PRINCE is at this inſtant, dedicating *the Sceptre of* his *Right Hand*, to Him *by whom Kings reign*, when like SOLOMON *in all his Glory*, He is offering up ſweet Incenſe for Himſelf and for his People.

IT is by his Command and Example, that We are aſſembled this Day to ſettle a long Account with our Conſcience, *wherefore I beſeech you Brethren by the Name of the Lord* Jeſus Chriſt, *to put off the Old Man and put on the New*, our Meetings in God's Houſe muſt no longer be the cold Performance of exterior Worſhip, if even *our ſolemn Meetings are Iniquity*, what ſhall We ſay of thoſe more unguarded Moments, when the Heart, betrayed by the Paſſions, *is wholly ſet in Us to do Evil.*

THE Matter is now in the Balance, and the Sword now drawn, which may Cut Us off from his Remembrance for ever; unleſs We can with unfeigned Zeal, and Hearts truly contrite, beſeech Him for the Glory of His Name, to turn from Us all thoſe Evils, which we moſt righteouſly have deſerved; *Our Necks have been Iron Sinews, and our Bows Braſs*, but they muſt be ſoftened, and wrought upon, Religion muſt give them the Poliſh, of which they ſtand ſo much in need, and Humility, her Handmaid, muſt refine them; Experience muſt teach us, that there is no Happineſs in this Life but what conſiſts in Virtue, that even if the beſt Men cannot be perfectly happy, in this *Vale of Tears*, how much leſs ſhall the Infidel. With theſe Reflections, though our Hands are at War, our Hearts may be at Peace, from a well-grounded Hope, that the *God of Peace* is on our Side; *Then Judgment ſhall dwell in the Wilderneſs, and Righteouſneſs remain in the fruitful Field*, and *the Work of Righteouſneſs ſhall be Peace, and the Effects of Righteouſneſs, Quietneſs, and Aſſurance for ever*. Where-

fore *Oh the Hope of* Iſrael! *the Saviour thereof in the Time of Trouble, though our Iniquities have teſtified againſt us, though the People of* Jeruſalem *are ſlidden back by a perpetual Backſliding, though they held faſt Deceit, and refuſed to let it go, though thou haſt hearkened, but they ſpake not aright; though no Man repented Him of his Wickedneſs, though every one turned to his Courſe*; Behold we turn unto thee with weeping, faſting, and praying; Behold, we here deſire to accept the Conditions of thy Mercy, *Behold, we come unto Thee, for Thou art the Lord our God.*

F I N I S.

Advertiſement.

The Publication of Academia, *a Poem in Six Books, and* Odes *on Several Subjects, by Mr.* Sheeles, *is Poſtponed 'till further Notice.*